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INFO RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 9463
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 8242
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1970
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0388
RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 0183
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT 0182
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY 0103
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SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT ADVISER RESIGNS OVER STOLEN ARTIFACTS

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. Two priceless 7th century artifacts en route to an exhibit in Paris disappeared from Zia International Airport cargo facilities December 23. Bangladesh's contribution of artifacts to the Paris exhibition has been the subject of months of controversy here. In response, on December 26 Education and Cultural Affairs Adviser Ayub Quadri accepted responsibility for the loss and submitted his resignation. Quadri is the first adviser of the caretaker government to step down since the government took office on January 12, 2007. END SUMMARY.

MYSTERY OF THE STOLEN VISHNU
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¶2. (U) A box containing two 7th century terracotta Vishnu statues disappeared from the cargo storage facilities of Zia International Airport on December 23. The two statues were part a 43-piece consignment of artifacts bound for an exhibition at the Guimet Museum in Paris. At 8PM that evening, law enforcement authorities found an empty packing crate floating in a ditch near the airport runway. Fifteen suspects were taken into custody, and on December 27, police reportedly found pieces of the statues at a landfill on the outskirts of Dhaka.

¶3. (U) The disappearance of the two artifacts is the latest development in a months-long saga regarding the planned exhibit of ancient Bangladesh treasures at the Guimet Museum in Paris. Several prominent Bangladeshi antiquities professors and cultural activists have opposed the government of Bangladesh's decision to ship the antiquities for display in Paris. The protestors expressed concerns about the security of the treasures and doubts about whether the museum would return all the pieces.

FRENCH EMBASSY CALLS DISAPPEARANCE "SUSPICIOUS"
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¶4. (U) In a press statement on December 24, the French Embassy in Dhaka called the disappearance of the two statues "highly suspicious" and said it could be an attempt to embarrass the governments of France and Bangladesh. The Embassy said "loose procedures" at the airport resulted in the crates sitting unsecured on the airport tarmac. The French also pointed out that if the Air France plane's arrival had not been delayed due to fog, the disappearance likely would not have been detected until the crates had

reached Paris. This would have resulted in finger-pointing at France rather than Bangladesh, thus legitimizing the concerns of the protestors, read the statement.

ADVISER RESIGNS OVER INCIDENT

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15. (U) Accepting responsibility for failing to safeguard the antiquities, Education and Cultural Affairs Adviser Ayub Quadri submitted his resignation to the Chief Adviser on the evening of December 26. He is the first adviser to resign since the government took power on January 12, 2007.

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